Social Work in the Public Library

HANNAH OLIVER
Where It Is Happening

• First full-time social worker employed through a public library happened in 2009 at the San Francisco Public Library - Leah Esguerra
• According to the ALA, there are approximately 16,500 central and branch buildings for public libraries in the US. As of now:
  • 44 libraries have a full-time social worker
  • 5 libraries have a part-time social worker
  • 18 libraries have social service office hours
  • 60 libraries have social worker interns
• This trend is still new, so statistics of social work intervention are not currently being tracked by the National Association of Social Workers or the American Library Association
• As far as research shows, Tennessee does not currently employ a social worker through any library system
Library Transformation

• To the public eye, it seems that libraries are transforming from being just a place of education and resource to more of a community hub

• With this change, an internal change in staff and process must occur to best serve our patrons

• Impactful change is not immediate, but long-term change is crucial

• Through social work intervention, the public library can better connect with our community and strengthen the Chattanooga community overall
Chattanooga Library- Downtown Branch

• Internship began on August 26th, 2019

• Goals for internship opportunity:
  • Bring additional service and assistance to support patrons in need of various social services
  • Strengthen staff by offering support, training, and education

• My initial action goals for this semester:
  • Education- Learning about the library culture, vision, goals of service, and policies
  • Engagement & Connection- Get to know staff, connect with patrons, make presence known
  • Observation- Analyze needs for staff, patrons, and identify any gaps in service
  • Community Engagement- networking and building relationships with local organizations in our community
Observations

• For Patrons:
  • Homelessness
  • Mental health challenges
  • Accessibility challenges
  • Literacy issues
  • Lack of adult programming
  • Adolescent behavioral challenges & accessibility challenges

• For Staff:
  • Lack of helpful resource knowledge
  • Overwhelmed or exhausted staff members
  • Lack of communication on best practices for handling challenging patrons
Progress Thus Far

- 8 adult individuals have found either shelter, temporary housing, or enlisted in a housing program
- 3 adult individuals have been assisted in finding employment and completing employment processes
- 2 adult individuals have been able to learn more about social security and how to access these programs
- 1 homeless veteran adult individual was able to be connected to Chattanooga Veteran Services
- 4 adult individuals have been able to discuss personal challenges & receive emotional support and insight
- 1 transgender adult individual received assistance in legally changing all identifying documents to identified gender
- 1 parent and child were assisted in processes through the Dept of Education to ensure education for the child
- 6 children have disclosed personal issues that opened conversation about emotional resilience and coping
- 1 teenager was able to learn how to create a job application account and a resume to find part-time employment
- 3 adolescent incidents have occurred where the intern was able to support staff
Progress Continued

• An updated resource list has been distributed to staff on all floors for additional help with assisting patrons
• Individual & small group meetings have been conducted with staff to learn more about staff experiences
• Attended monthly homeless coalition meetings to improve services offered to homeless patrons
• Consistent communication developed with security guards for further insight on patron issues
• Community relationships formed to connect the library with the outside community
Community Relationships

- Family Promise
- Community Kitchen
- Homeless Health
- Chattanooga Room In the Inn
- Maclellan Family Shelter
- Rescue Mission
- Partnership
- United Way & 2-1-1 Services
- UTC Nursing Services

- Baby University
- Hamilton County Department of Education
- Chattanooga Homeless Coalition
- Legal Aid of East Tennessee
- Chattanooga Veteran Services
- Salvation Army
- UTC Social Work Dept
Important Documents

• Personally developed a more structured way to assess and document patron interactions
  • Client Rights Form
  • Client Case Notes
  • Release of Information Form
Staff Evaluation

• To better understand the needs of staff members, a short survey was created and administered during the staff training day.

• Developed short questions to identify where staff members felt they lacked training and in what areas they were most interested in learning more about.

• Mostly quantitative questions with an option for a qualitative response at the end.
Staff Evaluation Results

• Top Reported Patron Observations by Staff
  • Homelessness
  • Mental Health Challenges
  • Literacy Challenges
  • Transportation Challenges
  • Unemployment
Staff Evaluation Results

• Top Reported Needs for Staff Training
  • Crisis Intervention / De-escalation
  • Mental Health Education
  • Local Resource Knowledge
  • Trauma-Informed Service
  • Emotional Boundaries
Staff Evaluation Results

• “I am not a social worker and don’t think I should be expected to serve as one”
• “The biggest thing I struggle with in my job is conflict resolution and de-escalation”
• “I want to learn more about having boundaries with patrons”
• “Just having a social worker/specialist here is very helpful. Having access to contacts that we are not permitted to is a bonus”
• “I would really appreciate more knowledge on many of these topics...we deal with them all the time and it would be great to be trained and be more confident with them”
• “A social worker is a great idea!”
• “It’s great to have a social worker available to help refer people who have needs that we often times do not have enough time to help”
Moving Forward

• Staff training-
  • first session on crisis intervention/ de-escalation will be on Dec 3rd
  • Trained staff from UTC Social Work Dept will be on-site
  • Online material to review will be available also

• Program development for both adults and children
  • UTC Dept of Nursing health fair- beginning next year
  • Programs focusing on adult literacy and career education
  • Collaboration with 2nd floor for programs focusing on emotional intelligence and coping for youth
  • Begin a focus on combining adult programming with child programming- a stronger family focus

• Continue intervention with patrons
  • Develop process in case management & better organize maintenance of patron relationships